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CONTACT: Ken August
or Lea Brooks
(916) 657-3064

CALIFORNIA RESUMES SMALLPOX VACCINATIONS

SACRAMENTO - State Health Director Diana M. Bontá, R.N., Dr.P.H., today announced that local health departments throughout the state may resume voluntary smallpox vaccinations of healthcare workers in their communities beginning April 7. This action marks the end of a one-week deferral of California's smallpox vaccination program that occurred while the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its recommendations regarding health conditions that would potentially increase the risk of an adverse reaction among those who are vaccinated.

"The safety and well-being of smallpox vaccine recipients remains our top concern," said Bontá. "The additional information, guidelines and screening forms regarding possible vaccine-related heart risks will allow us to proceed with the smallpox vaccination program as safely as possible."

Since Bontá asked local health departments to defer their smallpox vaccination programs, CDC has provided new guidelines and related screening materials regarding risk factors that would exclude someone from being vaccinated for smallpox. The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) has discussed the recommendations with the California Conference of Local Health Officers as well as representatives of other state health departments and disseminated the materials to local health departments. In addition, CDHS has recommended that local health departments advise those who were previously vaccinated of the additional risk factors and urge them to contact a health care provider if they develop symptoms of cardiac disease.

"The new guidelines for smallpox vaccination will add a greater measure of safety by deferring the vaccination of individuals with heart disease or risk factors," Bontá said.

The new guidelines advise potential vaccinees that, as a precautionary step, they should not be vaccinated if they have been diagnosed by a doctor as having a heart condition with or without symptoms. These heart conditions include:

- Known coronary disease, including:
- Previous myocardial infarction (heart attack).
- Angina (chest pain caused by lack of blood flow to the heart).
- Congestive heart failure.
- Cardiomyopathy (diseased heart muscle).

- Stroke or transient ischemic attack (a "mini-stroke" that produces stroke-like symptoms, but no lasting damage).
- Chest pain or shortness of breath on exertion (such as walking up stairs).
- Other heart conditions under the care of a doctor.

In addition, anyone with three or more risk factors for cardiac disease should not be vaccinated. These factors include: high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes or high blood sugar, an immediate family member who had a heart condition before age 50 or a current smoker.

The guidelines also advise potential vaccinees to see a health care provider right away if they develop chest pain, shortness of breath or other symptoms of cardiac disease after vaccination.

As part of ongoing efforts to protect the public from the potential threat of smallpox being used as a weapon of terror, local health departments throughout California may continue vaccinating healthcare workers who volunteer to be part of smallpox response teams. These teams will be responsible for providing medical care, disease investigation and vaccinating additional individuals in the event of a smallpox outbreak. As of March 28, a total of 1,282 Californians have been vaccinated for smallpox, including 197 in Los Angeles County, which has a separate vaccination program.

The risk of a smallpox outbreak is low. Smallpox vaccinations are being offered to healthcare workers on a strictly voluntary basis. CDHS has conducted training sessions throughout the state with vaccinators and healthcare workers to educate them about the smallpox virus as well as the smallpox vaccine and its associated health risks. Vaccination is not recommended for the general public at this time.

For more information about smallpox in English and Spanish, please visit <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/smallpox> or call the Governor's Office of Emergency Services Safety Information and Referral Line at (800) 550-5234, or TDD for the hearing impaired (800) 550-5281.